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**No. 2** in a series  
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**Christian Faith  
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# THE VOCATION OF A CHURCH IN AMERICA

A Sociologist's View

by *Guy E. Swanson*

**DETROIT  
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# **THE VOCATION OF A CHURCH IN AMERICA**

**A Sociologist's View**

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At the University of Michigan, Dr. Swanson offers courses in social change, social psychology, the behavior of organizations, and sociological theory. He is the author, with Daniel R. Miller, of *The Changing American Parent* and *Inner Conflict and Defense*. The University of Michigan Press published his most recent book in 1960 under the title *The Birth of the Gods, The Origin of Primitive Beliefs*.

The following material was originally presented as an address to a Joint Session of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America, September 1961, in Detroit, Michigan.

**C**HURCH OFFICIALS and social scientists are seeing more of each other. There was a time in the 1920s when we had close associations. Those were the days when sociologists were studying the decline of rural parishes and describing the problems of churches in the growing cities. Then our professions drifted apart, until these years since the Second World War, when the organizational problems of religious bodies bring us together once more.

### *Technical Assistance for Churches*

In the last two decades, social scientists have constructed personality tests to screen candidates for religious orders. They have instructed clergymen in techniques of counseling, in the mysteries of committee meetings, and in the skills of being at once preachers, pastors, administrators, teachers, counselors--yes, even prophets and priests. The churches have been helped in developing their work with primitive peoples and in planning their programs for the less privileged of our own society. New sanctuaries, like gasoline stations, are being located on the basis of advice about patterns of urban growth and traffic flow. In recent months, our sociology department at The University of Michigan was visited by a minister who wanted a forecast of the level of income that might be expected for the neighborhood of a certain Detroit

church. He was trying to decide whether to accept a call to its pulpit.

We all could add other examples of our collaborations, but most of these instances would share two characteristics found in the illustrations I have already given. First, we would find that most of our associations have concerned problems encountered by churches as they seek to work in an urban and industrial society--problems such as the rapid movements of population, the growing complexity of organizations, and the diversity of interests and cultures in America's cities. These same perplexities have moved other institutions to consult with professional students of social life.

But there is a second characteristic of the problems about which churchmen have consulted social scientists. You want our advice on tactics, not strategy; on better methods for executing plans, not on the programs you should be planning.

This is the experience of scientists with most institutions. The industrial firm asks for an evaluation of its advertising before inviting suggestions about its corporate objectives. Government agencies have long employed economists to improve their procedures for keeping books, but only recently have sought their advice concerning the general management of government's role in economic growth.

Perhaps the social sciences and the churches are now comfortable enough with each other to permit a still deeper relationship. Perhaps the social sciences can contribute to the churches' understanding of their vocation, of the special missions set for religious bodies by the texture of society in the United States.

### *Our Historical Situation*

The churches cannot escape the special historical situation of this society. They cannot

be churches (that is, congregations devoted to bringing man into a lively communion with God) unless they can become engaged in this history. The general character of a church's assignment in the world may be unchanging, but that general assignment can be fulfilled only through an ardent and informed engagement in the special needs and contingencies and social trends of each historical period.

My contribution as a social scientist is to present some of the conditions set by modern life for the definition and pursuit of your calling. It is for you to consider the implications of these conditions. Do they require only slight modifications in the organization of your work, or some fundamental reorganization? Would their pursuit transform the church into something you could not bear--or have you the confidence that you will find the resources and dedication for whatever work is needed? Does this modern world require a search for theological principles as yet unrecognized? Does it demand fresh efforts to extend, elaborate, and apply current doctrines? Is some combination of these projects in order? These, I repeat, are questions for *you*. My plan is to begin by reminding all of us of some essential elements in the outlook and work of a Christian church.

### *Essentials of the Church*

The church is not a social work agency, not a psychological clinic, and not an ethical culture society or an institute of industrial relations. It is an agency for uniting men with God. It sees the universe not as dead dust hung in space, but as the expression of a divine intention. It discerns the continuous action of that intention in nature and history. It interprets this action of God in human affairs as embodying love--love that is constant and unmerited--love that transforms the exercise of God's power into the rule of a legitimate authority--love that fulfills human history while transcending it. A Christian church sees men as needing to live in community with

God, as often being ignorant of His presence and character, but as possessing the freedom to ignore or reject God, even when they know Him. Finally, a church sees in human relations a school of love, a school in which men require one another if they are to enter into the life of Love Himself. Its vision is of a shared life of gratitude, of contrition, of justice and responsibility, of forgiveness sought, granted, and accepted, a life of contribution.

Does the structure of an urban industrial society pose special problems for a Christian church, for an agency seeking to bring men into a community with this vision of God? Indeed it does.

## THE VITALITY OF THEISM

Let me take up three major aspects of the church's outlook and illustrate the fashion in which modern life presents it with distinctive problems. The first of these has to do with the belief in God.

The church asserts that God is. It asserts that He is active in human affairs, that He is not a spirit who wound up the world, yawned, and crawled back into bed, but that He is ardently concerned with everyday events.

Under what conditions is this kind of belief likely to seem realistic and relevant to men? Some of our information concerning this question is negative. We know, that is, that many popular answers are wrong. There also are some observations which may point to the correct answers. I will say something about both kinds of information. But to assess these findings, we first need a context for our thinking.



## *Belief and Social Order*

Belief in a god, whether the Divine Presence known to Christians or some other, is a belief that reality is organized, not chaotic. Gods are purposing, intending beings, shaping the world to their desires. Monotheism conceives all reality as created by a single deity and, sometimes, as governed by him as well. In either case, his character has determined the structure of existence; has given it a form and order.

The experiences in nature from which men might derive such a belief seem not to come from the inanimate or subhuman world.<sup>1</sup> Peoples living within essentially the same geographic conditions--terrain, climate, plant and animal forms--differ considerably in their religious beliefs and, indeed, in whether they have such beliefs at all. By contrast, recent systematic studies of primitive and ancient peoples show a correspondence between the belief in a divine order and the existence of ordered experiences as provided by membership in some enduring, decision-making social group. An example, chosen because it can be described in brief compass, is that of ancestral spirits. These are deities, sometimes very powerful deities, who once lived in human flesh but now return as spiritual kinsmen to interact with living men. Research indicates that a belief in such spirits occurs in societies in which some group of kinsmen--a group more enduring than the nuclear family of a husband, wife, and their children--is organized to make important decisions about the affairs of its members. Many clans and extended families are cases in point. This enduring group, in principle immortal, seems to be represented by the belief that the purposes of the ancestral dead are still represented in men's affairs, are still actively controlling their lives.

Of greater importance for experience in modern societies is the finding in these same investigations that certain conditions of organized

social life are commonly associated with a belief in monotheism, with a belief that the monotheistic deity is active in human affairs, and with a belief that he is concerned about the morality of men's conduct.

Interesting though these observations are in themselves, I have cited them to document the point that experience of the presence and activity of any deity is an experience of an underlying order and unity in reality, and that experiences of such an order in social affairs seem especially potent in determining the existence and vitality of these beliefs.

### *Mistaken Assumptions*

It happens, however, that certain popular judgments about the conditions under which modern Americans have a firm belief in God or find Him active in their personal lives or guiding and shaping their society's history are grounded in the assumption that threats or chaos are the roots of faith. Take, as examples, the two theories which seem most popular in the religious press when the recent, much-debated "revival" of religion comes under discussion. One of these theories states that people conjure up a conviction of God's presence, power, and goodness when it seems that civilization is about to collapse in a nuclear inferno. The second declares that our society is already fragmented to the point of near chaos, that our citizens, having pinned their faith on science or technology or urbanism, have seen these fail to bind our problems and our sorrows. Now, bowed and disillusioned, they have fled to God for shelter.

To determine the accuracy of such judgments, we put some questions to a random sample of adults in metropolitan Detroit.<sup>2</sup> First, we tried to determine whether they believed in God, and if so, the firmness of their conviction. We also sought to learn whether theirs was a lively and continuing interaction with Him.

One should be somewhat skeptical about responses to an interview as the means for getting at such matters. The blood of the martyrs might be a better index, but the thumb screw and the rack are not yet standard tools of research in social science. At any rate, people differ considerably in their answers to our questions, and particular individuals are quite consistent in their responses from one question to another. These characteristics of their replies allow us to study, at minimum, what they may want us to think they believe.

We then inquired about their fear of nuclear war. We asked whether they thought it likely that atomic bombs would fall on Detroit and sought their estimates of the resulting destruction and the likelihood that our society would recover from it. There is no association between the vitality of our respondents' beliefs in God and their answers to these questions about nuclear warfare.

There also is no relationship between their religious convictions and their feelings about the fruits of science or about urbanism. Further, there is little evidence of widespread disillusion with science or city life. Half of our respondents spontaneously mentioned some aspect of scientific or technological advance as among our country's features which they value most. About half of them felt that, given enough time and money, science could solve almost all of man's important problems. Finally, three-fourths of our respondents preferred the way of life they found in or near a big city to that of a farm or a small town distant from an urban center. (Contrary to certain romantic views, only six per cent would prefer to live on a farm.)

### *Generation after Generation*

Another widely held notion is that the vitality of theism in America is related to the number of generations an individual's family has lived in this country. Will Herberg advanced this

thesis to interpret religious trends among Jews in America, and others have tried to extend it to Protestants and Roman Catholics.<sup>3</sup> In essence it is argued that the immigrant generation is devout, but their children, in order to become thoroughly accepted in America, must reject their parents' culture including its religious beliefs. The second generation, this argument goes, is likely to lack all positive belief. If, by the third generation, the immigrant group has made its way successfully in American society, it can and will accept something of the grandparents' cultural heritage, including its religious convictions—though perhaps in modified form.

Studies in Detroit do not reveal the trends this theory predicts.<sup>4</sup> American Jews of different generations do not show them, nor do Protestants. A detailed inquiry in Detroit finds that the more generations Roman Catholics have been in this country, the more orthodox they are in belief and the more faithful in personal and institutional religious practice. Among Catholics, the immigrant generation was least devout of all.

Because our information for metropolitan Detroit is more comprehensive than that for any other urban area in the country, I shall continue by reporting certain observations in this metropolitan area. For the population at large, and for white Protestants in particular, there are no more than trivial associations between the vitality of the citizens' reported belief in God and their education, income, age, sex, ethnic background, the education of their grandparents, the prestige of their occupations, or the point they have reached in the "life cycle" of family development from having just been married to living in retirement.

### *The Future of Theism*

One important judgment from these observations is this: the parts of the community most

likely to determine its religious future show no marked decline in theism. The picture would have quite a different significance were the young, the better educated, those whose families had been in this country longest, or those with higher incomes and white collar occupations exhibiting an appreciably lesser concern with theism.

Strength of theism has only a slight association with frequency of church attendance or of private prayer or of reading the Bible. (Recent increases in the percentage of our people holding church membership seem but the latest manifestations of a trend that has developed steadily from the early nineteenth century. Membership in all formal organizations is positively related to income and education. As the American people have become progressively more affluent and educated, a greater percentage joins many kinds of formal organizations, the churches among them. It is likely that the high prosperity of the years since World War II helps to account for the substantial increase in church membership in that period.) Several studies suggest that a strong theism represents an experience of God's being and importance which many people do not relate to the "means of grace" traditional in Christian practice. Whether their failure to make this connection results from ignorance, lassitude, or a sense that the formulations of the churches are somehow inappropriate or irrelevant, one cannot say. But, when so many Americans have an experience which they regard as important and yet cannot formulate for themselves, we probably are right in thinking that they would be receptive to an appropriate formulation. If they are thus receptive, they are not receiving what they need from today's Christian ministry.

Up to this point I have called attention to the absence of associations between the vitality of our citizens' beliefs in God and modern social conditions. I have also mentioned the finding, in Detroit, of strengthened practice, if not belief,

among the younger Catholics. Are any conditions known to be positively associated with vitality of religious beliefs as I have been defining such convictions?

There are certain tantalizing hints of such relationships. I call them hints because, although they appear in several studies, much more work is required to determine their meaning.<sup>5</sup> I will summarize these findings in terms that are broadly correct although, in a more detailed account, certain qualifications would be necessary.

### *Our Emerging Urban Culture*

Three studies have shown that, among Christians, certain indices believed to mirror fuller participation in our emerging urban culture are associated with vitality of theism. Two of these investigations employed samples of undergraduate students at The University of Michigan. In these samples, consisting largely of young men and women from white-collar families, the associations appear for Protestants only. The third study, employing a random sample of adults in the Detroit metropolitan area, finds these associations for Catholics as well.

What are these crucial indices reflecting fuller participation in the emergent social structure of our society? The first is place of work. America is becoming a country in which more and more of the labor force works for someone else rather than being self-employed, and is employed in very large organizations--manufacturing plants, retail establishments, educational, religious, and governmental institutions. This trend has accelerated sharply since the 1940s.

The second index concerns the form of a man's income. More and more Americans obtain their income in the form of wages and salary instead of rents, profits, fees, commissions, and the like. The third is community background. Obviously an ever larger percentage of Americans is born in a town or city rather than on a farm. The

fourth is national origin. There is a steady increase in the proportion of Americans born in this country. (This index refers simply to foreign or native birth. A measure mentioned earlier as *not* generally associated with theism concerned the number of generations a family has been in this country.)

To put the matter simply, the trend is for Americans to be progressively more urbanized, more bureaucratized, and more fully Americanized. It was our guess that those parts of our population that have participated most fully in these trends would perceive themselves most in tune with the social order emerging among us and would be most at home in it. By contrast, we thought that persons least in touch with these newer trends would find this society a strange world, formless and chaotic. About half of Detroit's adults meet all our criteria for fuller participation in modern America. The remainder fail to meet one or more of them. Following the reasoning I presented earlier, one would expect that an experience of the social world as fundamentally orderly and comprehensible would nourish theism; that an experience of that world as strange, threatening, and chaotic would weaken religious experience. Our findings are consistent with that reasoning. They remain so when we hold constant such considerations as the respondents' age, sex, and social class.

It would be premature to speculate too broadly on results that need further careful examination, but one point can be made which seems a conservative interpretation. Our findings suggest that some of the most powerful and characteristic trends of modern life are actually supportive of a belief in God and of an experience of His action in individual lives. The findings suggest that there may well be a new openness to religious ideas in our society; that our people may now present the churches with a more serious interest in religion as well as more applications for membership. If this is even moderately close to the truth, the slighting,

caustic attitude taken by writers in religious periodicals toward the possibilities of a "revival" of theistic belief would deprive the historic churches of one of their great opportunities. Asked for bread, they would have offered a cynic's stone.

## MODERN SOCIETY AS A SCHOOL OF LOVE

For a Christian church, it is not enough that men have some vague sense of God's presence and power. A church declares that the world is organized by God's love. This is not to say that loving or being loved always brings happiness. It does not mean that everyone or everything is worthy of trust or respect — or that, through love, men can come to understand all aspects of their experience. The doctrine does mean that individuals who extend trust and love and rational understanding to other people, and who receive such goods from them, will generally find their lives meaningful and satisfying.

### *An Alien World*

Some men certainly do not find this position sensible or relevant. Consider, for example, what it would mean to endorse most or all of the following statements that have been employed in polls of public opinion:<sup>6</sup>

There is little use in writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man.

Nowadays a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself.

These days a person doesn't really know who he can count on.



In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better.

It's hardly fair to bring children into the world with the way things look for the future.

Each of these is pessimistic, but to endorse most or all of them indicates a seriously distrustful outlook, a picture of the world as providing vague but persistent and serious threats which cannot be overcome by rational effort or love. Indeed, taken together, these statements have been called an index of alienation. They picture a world unordered and unorderable, unloving and not deserving of love. People who have this outlook are likely to find the Christian perspective unreal, its ministry irrelevant.

Does anyone actually have such a desperate outlook? A recent study in Detroit of members of the United Auto Workers (AFL-CIO) found that 13 per cent agreed with four or more of these statements; a third with three or more.<sup>7</sup> Only a quarter of the respondents disagreed with every statement. Old age, low education, and lower socio-economic status are moderately related to alienation when each is considered alone, but especially large proportions of the alienated occur among persons of eighth grade education or less, among Protestants of low economic status, and among workers of relatively high socio-economic status who are over age 40. Persons agreeing with three or more statements feel personally impotent with regard to political matters. They also are more likely to express little feeling of personal accomplishment, to feel that their chances for personal improvement are slight, and to be dissatisfied with many aspects of their lives.

A study of male respondents in San Francisco produced some findings similar to those from Detroit. Alienation was associated with advancing age and lower socio-economic status, and

each of these conditions retains its relationship to alienation when the other is held constant.<sup>8</sup> There are reports of the same association of socio-economic status and alienation from Lansing, Michigan, and Springfield, Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup>

### *Alone in the Crowd*

The investigators in San Francisco made a further discovery. With age and economic status controlled, persons who had few memberships in formal organizations such as churches or clubs or unions, and persons who had few informal contacts such as those with friends, neighbors, or co-workers, were more likely to be alienated.<sup>10</sup>

Up to this point, we have seen that age, economic position, and social isolation are independently associated with alienation. When these conditions are combined, the alienation scores increase markedly. In San Francisco almost two-thirds of those who are older, of lower status, and isolated are also alienated as contrasted with only eight per cent of those at the opposite extreme (i.e., younger, high status, high in social participation).<sup>11</sup> Results similar in character were found in a small city in up-state New York.<sup>12</sup>

This relation between alienation and substantial isolation from one's society also appears in studies of political movements.<sup>13</sup> There is evidence which suggests that, both in the United States and Europe, individuals who are personally isolated or who work in occupations like mining, fishing, lumbering, and shipping which remove employees from normal participation in community activities are more likely than other persons of their education and income to participate in irrational, violently hostile political movements.

### *Tarnished Status*

We can summarize the findings from these several investigations by saying that the old,

the poor, those of little education, and the socially isolated are strikingly less likely to see their world as characterized by reason and love. But research has shown at least one other segment of the population to have a similar outlook. These are people who suffer a sharp decline in social respect, not because they have less income or education than their fathers or the population at large, but because those parts of the population which once were lower in status than they have now become their equals or their superiors.<sup>14</sup> This has been the experience of many Americans of older ethnic stock who find children of later immigrants forging ahead of them in socio-economic status. It has been the situation of small enterprisers, both in agriculture and urban businesses, who become of less importance in our society with the growth of larger corporate structures. It has been the situation of rural and small town people generally in the face of urban growth.

Once again, the evidence comes from Europe as well as America--evidence that such persons are especially susceptible to extremist, hate-filled politics--usually rightist in orientation. One finds many people from this same segment of modern societies exhibiting vague, paralyzing fears in many directions. They oppose flouridation, Jews, and higher education. They are more likely than others to suspect the political loyalty of their neighbors and to believe that some hidden, sinister, moral decay is eating on all our institutions.

The workings of modern societies will probably relieve some of these sources of alienation, exacerbate others. It is possible that, if properly distributed, wealth flowing from increased productivity will obliterate most economic insecurity; that the progressive democratization of our society will remove most of those differentials in respect which embitter our politics. These same forces may also remove many of the difficulties that make old age a tragedy instead of a fulfillment.

But other forces are also at work. Economic changes will not cease and are likely to leave formerly respectable occupations and communities as less privileged backwaters. The very size of urban concentrations makes it more difficult for individuals to participate meaningfully in politics or formal organizations or to establish and maintain the kind of informal social relations which offer satisfaction. Contrast, for example, the individual's situation in a small community where he knows, and is known by, almost everyone with his situation in a metropolis like Detroit where approximately 20 per cent of the adult population neither belongs to any formal organization (not even a church or union) nor, in a typical week, has friendly contacts with relatives, neighbors, friends, or co-workers.

## MODERN SOCIETY AS A COMMUNITY OF OBLIGATION

My final illustration of a church's vocation in modern society concerns the *giving* of love. This obviously is a vast topic and I can give only one of the many findings from social investigations which bear upon it. As before, we must first clarify the issue. A church urges men to love one another, not for sentiment's sake, but because it defines the essence of Being as loving and declares that, by loving, men grow into the life of God.

### *A Sense of Community Obligation*

Under what conditions do people have a sense of community? In what situations do they feel responsible for one another and under some moral obligation for their neighbors' welfare? Many of the observations I have mentioned previously are relevant once more. The same conditions that provide experiences of order and of an ordering by love are associated with acts of

obligation as well. To those observations, I would add another because it has special relevance for the character of our society and because it is quite different from those already reviewed. I take it from investigations by my colleague Robert Angell.<sup>15</sup>

For some time, Angell has been interested in what he calls the moral integration of cities. This is an intricate concept. In Angell's work it represents the extent to which a city's inhabitants assume responsibility for each other's welfare. He measures that responsibility by means of an index consisting of the crime rate (a negative indicator) and the amount, *per capita*, of contributions to community welfare agencies (a positive indicator). (As one would think necessary, he corrects these contributions to welfare by the median income in each city.)

This index of moral integration is associated with low rates of migration. This means that if relatively few people move in and out of a city, the crime rate is apt to be low and the rate of contribution to civic improvement high.

The index also registers the presence of high integration in cities having a large percentage of native-born whites. Angell believes that this association represents a connection between a community's homogeneity and moral integration. He reasons that, where people are alike, they tend to feel a sense of community and mutual obligation. In this connection, one must be clear that the finding is not believed due to race, as such, with whites tending to be more responsible than Negroes. Investigations of certain all-Negro communities in the deep South show them to have a high degree of solidarity. To repeat, current thinking associates a community's integration with the homogeneity of its population, not race.

Angell reports a third relationship important for our purpose. Moral integration is high in communities where the difference between the

highest and lowest amounts of rent is small. Once again, this appears to be an indication of the city's homogeneity. In this case, the absence of wide discrepancies in social class appears to be crucial.

The findings Angell obtained are especially significant for an understanding of urban life because he worked only with large cities, employing a sample of American communities having populations in excess of 100,000. Had he included smaller cities or towns and semi-rural areas, his work would be less valuable in forecasting the future of urban, industrialized societies. Major cities like Rochester, Buffalo, and Cleveland rank high on his measure of moral integration; Louisville, Portland (Oregon), and Atlanta are among the relatively low. Detroit happens to fall at about the middle of the integration scores.

### *The Corrosion of Community*

It is clear that the very process of urbanizing contains factors which interfere with a community's integration. The rate of migration, for example, is extremely high in our society.<sup>16</sup> About 20 per cent of all American families change their place of residence in any given year. Each year about six per cent of all American families move from the communities where they now live. It seems unlikely that these rates will decline; indeed, in a fluid economy possessed of ever-improving means of transportation, they may well increase. These trends will probably depress the moral integration of cities for a long time to come.

We can be fairly certain that the complexities of urban life are not going to decline, and the complexities of our economy tend to make for diversity rather than homogeneity—for differences in people's backgrounds, interests, and incomes. Again, these are factors that work against a sense of community.

The picture I have presented is not simple. I spoke earlier of social trends that support the churches' outlook on man and his world. Now I have sketched developing conditions which oppose that outlook. No one is presently sophisticated enough to predict what the balance will be.

## A VOCATION

A vocation is a summons to a task. With what special tasks does modern society confront a church?

If men in a changing, urban, and industrial society are to share the Christian outlook on the world, they must experience its reasonableness and relevance in that society. The church which cannot find ways to influence the character of that society, to analyze that society, and to formulate man's experience in it, will not succeed in its mission. One does not influence a great social order effectively through the slow process of converting millions of individuals one at a time. One must find ways to penetrate the major organizations and institutions where fundamental decisions are made, and to influence those decisions--the corporations and unions, professional associations, and the agencies of government. The work of uniting men with God cannot be accomplished solely through formal instruction, or through a parish system organized according to the place where people reside, without reference to the wider realms in which they spend most of their lives. Nor can this work be conducted through the activities of the denomination's national organizations. A church simply must find ways to establish congregations detached from the accident of residence, and founded on the vital associations around work and politics and community welfare in which our people are immersed.

The church must not deceive itself on certain important matters. Study after study shows that modern Americans like urban life, and are enthusiastic about science and technology.

The church must realize that certain theological issues are of a peculiar relevance to modern society, and it must provide the formulations for symbolizing and meeting these issues. It must, for example, take seriously the persistence of diversity and conflict in our society — even of conflicts that, on one level, are irreconcilable — and must show afresh how human interdependence makes relevant the practice of charity.

The church must realize that our growing knowledge of the extent of interdependence overwhelms responsible men with obligation, and even with guilt; she must discover how, within a Christian life, these mounting obligations can be managed — if not by particular individuals, then by organizations of specialized individuals, each responsible for some part of the whole. The church must develop a theology of organizations, recognizing that whatever the intentions of their individual members, organizations come to have something of a life of their own, and many unanticipated consequences. The churches must understand that in an egalitarian society they depend for their authority on men's understanding and assent to the Christian tradition, and not on the authority of the tradition itself.

### *Opportunity in a New Age*

Finally, the church must recognize its opportunity. As many social scientists are saying, this period is characterized by the end of ideology.<sup>17</sup> They mean that many rallying points for men's commitments across the past two centuries no longer have their old appeal—at least in the western world. Despite hard, appalling pockets of poverty and ignorance, the bulk of the population is experiencing an ever-growing affluence. The economies of all western nations have become partly socialized and



managed, assuring the individual great security, and yet political liberties were never stronger. In addition, successive waves of the population have been enfranchised--politically and socially, as well as economically. In this situation, the traditional issues separating the political left and right have declined in importance. The fundamental political problems of the industrial revolution are approaching solution. This is a time when the fires of nationalism are burning low in the West, and there is much talk of new and more inclusive units of organization. As these old loyalties and outlooks decay, men everywhere are in the midst of rethinking their views. In that process they turn inescapably to the most fundamental values and perspectives of Western culture.

Will the church be ready to take its place in this work? Will it speak in a language that can be understood? Will it have an organization that is relevant? And if we prove right in the opinion that there are trends in our society supportive of a belief in an orderly, loving, and purposeful universe, will the church be ready to go into the whitened fields and bring in the harvest?

## NOTES

1. These arguments, and those which follow, are evaluated in Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, n.d.) and Guy E. Swanson, *The Birth of the Gods, The Origin of Primitive Beliefs* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960).
2. This information was gathered by the Detroit Area Study of The University of Michigan in 1959. The results are being analyzed for future publication.
3. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1955).
4. Gerhard E. Lenski, *The Religious Factor, A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics, and Family Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1961), pp. 39-43.
5. The information about students is reported in: Daniel R. Miller and Guy E. Swanson, *The Changing American Parent, A Study in the Detroit Area* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1958), pp. 276-295, and Harry C. Dillingham, "Occupational Bureaucratization, Denominational Structure, and Religious Vitality," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, The University of Michigan, 1960. Information about the sample of adults in metropolitan Detroit is taken from the unpublished findings of the 1959 Detroit Area Study.
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